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Dear Josh,

One is really reminded of Job - "he had not finished speaking when another messenger arrived"; while I was brooding on how to describe to you our bitter disappointment with the way the Kissinger mission has ended and already here is Sadat's great speech and it almost overshadows the previous topic. How can one follow the pace of events in the Middle East? I almost feel nostalgic for the famous lethargic Levant of which I only heard but never met.

For most of us the suspension of the negotiations with Egypt came as a surprise - despite indications towards the end that the going was rough. Even before Kissinger began his shuttle between Jerusalem and Egypt, he had put his chances of success at fifty-fifty, which ought to have meant that he reckoned that the odds were considerably higher. The interests on both sides in another agreement appeared to us compelling, and so it almost looked as though only the content of the agreement needed to be discussed.

Clearly these hopes were foolish - we seemed to have harboured an illusion. What has happened? Some commentators both here and abroad seem to think that it was a breakdown of communications mainly between Kissinger and us. We hinted at far-reaching concessions, we talked of maximum flexibility on our part, and I think we meant it so. Kissinger thought that our concessions would mean foregoing the demand of the Egyptian quid pro quo. There are other theories as well: at least three of these are 'conspiracy' views. Some say that Kissinger was pulling us by the nose - I do not believe in that for a moment. Others again think that Sadat was pulling K. by the nose - possible, but not very likely. Some very few even think that we were misleading the U.S. on purpose:

I would never consider ascribing such short sighted stupidity to our leaders whom I think I know well enough for that. No, it seems that the first one is the right one, that is breakdown of communication.

We were seeking nothing less than a political agreement; Egypt nothing more than a military one. Our aim was to bring about a fundamental change in our relations with Egypt. Thus the central issue for us was not territory, but signs of Egypt's willingness to end the 27-year-old state of war, and to move step by hesitant step towards peace. Egypt turned out to be completely unwilling to think in these terms and sought another military agreement with us which would bring more disengagement, and more territory, without any commitment to peace.

That during these hectic weeks of negotiations our basic approach to achieve a political advance and to get nearer to peace was forgotten amidst the talk about territories and strategic passes is a fiasco of our poor and understaffed and overworked information services and not a change in attitude or conception. But the fact is that this did get forgotten somehow.

From the outset, we were prepared to make far-reaching concessions to achieve a political agreement. The fact that we were willing to adopt a gradualist approach to help overcome Egypt's deep reluctance to enter a full peace at this stage was a concession in itself. In more tangible terms, we were prepared to make major sacrifices - at one and the same time territorial (large chunks of Sinai), strategic (the Mitla and Gidi passes) and economic (the oil fields at Abu Rhodeis) - for a binding commitment putting an end to the state of war.

When it became obvious that the Egyptians were not prepared for this kind of agreement, we proposed a less rigorous form of commitment in terms of limitations on the use of force. For this we offered rather less territory, but we were still prepared to withdraw to the western side of the two vital passes, and give the Egyptians back the oil-fields at Abu Rhodeis.

The Egyptians turned these proposals down as well. They also rejected any mechanisms which would have implied that peace was in the making. For parties to make peace, it seems to us axiomatic that they must have direct contact with one another. But Egypt would not contemplate combined military teams to supervise the new buffer zone, or the possibility of tourism and travel between our two countries on the model of "open bridges" which have operated successfully across the River Jordan since 1967. And for the agreement to have any meaning, it had to be of sufficient duration to reduce tensions and allow more positive relationships to take root... The furthest the Egyptians were prepared to go was that the agreement should be renewed annually by the UN Security Council. There was no question of relaxing their economic, diplomatic and propaganda warfare against Israel.

Has a unique opportunity for lessening the Arab-Israel conflict been lost? Kissinger's arguments were that any agreement with Egypt was better than none. It would buy time, it could pave the way to further agreements. Failure to achieve an understanding would spell the end to his "step by step" approach, would mean a return to Geneva, renewed Soviet influence in Egypt and a greatly increased probability of another cruel war in the Middle East - with all that that implies for us and possibly for the West as a whole.

Kissinger's arguments were not taken lightly. But the remarkable thing is how solidly the country has lined up behind the Government.

Having lived through this whole period with almost agonizing hope for a settlement what finally convinced me that we could not have gone further, that we should not even consider going further was not the Egyptian refusal to announce publicly a vow of non-belligerency; on this I was ready to accept the usual arguments that inter-Arab pressure on Sadat was such that he could not grant that. It was the much less-talked about Egyptian refusal to allow on both sides of the strategic passes to set up electronic equipment as an early warning system on both sides to prevent surprise attacks. I do not think that anybody could make the case easily that on such an issue there was inter-Arab pressure; I am very much afraid that here my faith in Arab, that is Egyptian, wish for peace got a severe shock. That this fact, though less advertized (though by no means a secret) was at the heart of the final breakdown of the negotiations is my firm uninformed belief. If it is, the muting of this point in the official announcements could point to a still existing belief that if not announced too loudly the Egyptians might give in on this point if all other avenues are closed.

There is also quiet satisfaction at the firmness with which the Government stuck to its principles, despite the not inconsiderable pressure which the United States was able to bring to bear, through the presence of the tireless Dr. Kissinger and in other ways. For Kissinger himself there is tremendous admiration and now, after his failure to bring off another agreement, a great deal of sympathy. But the truth is that the developments in Vietnam and Cambodia did not help him. Not by chance was he taken to Massada on his last Saturday morning here.

All in all what one can say now is : united we stand, and united - I hope - we shall remain to stand. But also let us remember what Rabin said the other day and I am sure he meant it : he was referring to his recent popularity as a result of the Government's firm stand and he made the point that he would gladly give up his newly gained popularity for a new agreement with Egypt.

What now? Perhaps Geneva; but hopefully before that a renewed American effort to bring Israel and Egypt to some kind of agreement.

As to Sadat's speech there was one very interesting remark in it : he said that he had thought that the U.S. would pressure Israel into major concessions. Perhaps it will be to the good that on that issue he was disillusioned. But all my ramblings have to do with a kind of political analysis which you probably can read in one or the other of the better (I hope) dailys or weeklys. What really gnaws into the flesh of our heart is a dark suspicion that we are losing the understanding and sympathy of the American public, Congress and Administration. Very often in the past when our own criticism against our own government was strong how to present our case seemed less important . Now that we are really united on what we think, it suddenly burst upon us the intensity of the task of how to present our case. Would it be presumptuous on my part to ask your advice and perhaps even your help if you share my pre-suppositions and, as always we are eager to have your criticism if you think that we could or should have acted differently.

Your

Yehuda